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FM REO BASRAH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0384
INFO RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEHBC/REO BASRAH 0403

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BASRAH 000104

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/18/2016
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SUBJECT: MAJOR GENERAL LATIF MOTIVATED TO TACKLE BASRAH SECURITY PROBLEMS

REF: BASRAH 93

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CLASSIFIED BY: Ken Gross, REGIONAL COORDINATOR, REO BASRAH,
DEPARTMENT OF STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: In a June 14 meeting with the Regional Coordinator (RC) and Deputy Regional Coordinator (DRC), Major General Abdul Latif of the 10th Division of the Iraqi Army expressed support for Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's recent visit to Basrah and his efforts to enhance security in Basrah. Increased security measures have resulted in a recent decrease in murders, he said. MG Latif agreed to coordinate with the British military to provide an Iraqi Army presence outside the main gate of the Regional Embassy Office in Basrah to deter attacks on local employees. The Iraqi Army was qualified and capable of carrying out its duties, he said, and morale was high among the soldiers. In his view, the assassinations were being carried out by criminal elements whose ultimate aim is to divide Basrah from the rest of Iraq and control its resources. End Summary.

Support for the Prime Minister's Visit

12. (C) In a June 14 meeting with the RC and DRC, Major General (MG) Abdul Latif of the 10th Division of the Iraqi Army expressed support for Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's recent visit to Basrah. Citing the political corruption and numerous assassinations that plague Basrah, MG Latif called the visit "a new beginning." He said that the PM recognized the extent of the problem during his visit to Basrah and that the additional security measure that have been put into place since the visit resulted in a reduction in murders. (Comment: There were six murders reported to the Police Joint Operations Center- PJOC- in Basrah on June 13 and only one murder on June 14. However, it is still too soon to tell if the murder rate has really dropped. End Comment.) Exuding confidence, he considered it an honor that the PM had requested him to take on a leadership role in Basrah and stated that the Iraqi Army (IA) had been accorded a large role in implementing the security plan. He firmly stated that the IA's role was to support the central government.

13. (C) In accordance with the security plan, MG Latif said that he is in charge of four brigades, with one located in each of the four southern provinces. One company from each from the provinces of Muthanna, Dhi Qar, and Maysan, has been brought in to buttress his forces in Basrah. The increase in troops results allows him to increase IA presence in the city, MG Latif said, and these men would not be biased by political party

affiliation or militias since they come from outside Basrah. The end result, he said, would be to frighten and control the criminal elements in Basrah responsible for most of the murders. Even with the recent reduction in murders, he did not intend to let up on the security campaign.

New Security Committee?

14. (C) MG Latif alluded to a new security committee that had been formed in Baghdad without the knowledge of the political parties to address security in Basrah, and its members are scheduled to arrive in Basrah soon. This new security committee is a very good thing, he said, because it shows that Baghdad was taking the situation in Basrah seriously and recognizing that the political parties were part of the security problem. He was unsure of the names of the members of the new committee, but believed that there were seven people on the committee and that Minister Safa al-Saafi heads the new committee. The committee will report directly to the Prime Minister and not to the governor. (Comment: If this is true, we suspect that Minister al-Saafi is not unbiased and will act in support of Basrah Governor Mohammed al-Wa'eli. See reftel. End Comment).

Relations with CoP, Governor

15. (C) In regards to Basrah Chief of Police (CoP) Hassan Sewady al-Saad and the Basrah Iraqi Police Services (IPS), MG Latif said he maintained good relations with the CoP and tried to help him when possible with security matters, but that he was aware that the CoP did not trust 80 percent of his own IPS. The crux of the problem with the IPS in Basrah, he said, was that there was a lack of field supervision. He said that while on patrols in Basrah, he would instruct IA soldiers to put on their body armor and helmets if they were not wearing them, but no real supervision of IPS exists. Although there is a genuine problem with militia and political party infiltration into the IPS, he

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said that this problem could be addressed through professional supervision and direction.

16. (C) MG Latif described his relations with Governor Mohammed as starting off well at the beginning, but said that his efforts to maintain communications were not reciprocated by the governor and that the governor had not attended the funerals of his two sons. He described taking a trip to Nassiriyah and observing the close cooperation between the governor of Dhi Qar and the IA commander. He said that the lack of communication and cooperation between the IA and the Basrah governor only served to increase security problems.

17. (C) When asked about the governor's push to have him removed from his position, the MG scoffed, saying the governor had no authority over the IA. He acknowledged that the Basrah Provincial Council had convened on June 11 and voted on replacing the CoP as well, but said that they were not able to obtain the necessary number of votes. The BPC, he said, was "uneducated" because it attempted to get rid of the people they found difficult to work with instead of seeking ways to maintain dialogue.

Criminals and Mafia Types Carrying Out Murders

18. (C) He acknowledged that Sunnis, academics, and Iraqis associated with the Coalition were being targeted for murder. The perpetrators are opportunist "mafia types" that attacked the only people they can get at. Most of the militias, he said, are made up of criminals who had records for theft and murder. Jayish Al Mahdi (JAM) is the worst of the militias, he said, and is responsible for most of the IEDs and mortar attacks in the city. These incidents are exacerbated by lack of interest on the part of the BPC-he described an incident during the PM's

visit to Basrah where Vice President Hashimi specifically mentioned that Sunnis were being targeted in Basrah and leaving because of it. BPC Chairman Sadoon al-Obadi had interjected that the Sunnis in Basrah were free to leave if they wanted, and no one was forcing them to go. These remarks caused a strong reaction from the other people in the room.

¶9. (C) The criminals were targeting teachers, religious leaders, and minorities in Basrah in order to ultimately divide Basrah from the rest of Iraq and control its resources, in MG Latif's view. The Oil Protection Forces (OPF) is heavily infiltrated by these criminals, he said, because their positions give them easy access oil and profit from smuggling. Every time the IA was close to capturing some of the smugglers, he said, these individuals were killed by other members of the OPF to protect the group as a whole. Political parties, and Fadillah in particular, pressures members of the OPF and Facilities Protection Services (FPS) to join their party, he said.

¶10. (C) Despite the recent decrease in murders, MG Latif said that he suspected that many of the criminals were just laying low and waiting for the 30-day state of emergency to end before upping their activities again. He said the best way to have a lasting effect on security in Basrah was to focus on "filtering" the IPS and removing those who were corrupt and engaged in criminal activity. He expected this to be the main goal of the new security committee that was coming down from Baghdad and that it would take six to nine months to root out the criminals in the IPS.

Iraqi Army Up to the Challenge

¶11. (C) MG Latif was optimistic about the ability of the IA to carry out its role in the security plan. Gaps in resources existed, he admitted, but there were enough soldiers to get the job done. The IA launched a public education campaign in Basrah to direct people to call a hotline to report killings and kidnappings and to respect IA convoys and give them the right of way so they can do their job. He described his soldiers as well-trained and morale as good, because the soldiers believed that they were working to protect people.

Increased Protection for REO Employees

¶12. (C) The RC asked the MG to consider increasing IA presence outside the main gate of the Regional Embassy Office to deter the monitoring of the movements of local employees and attacks on them. The MG replied that this should be possible and that he would coordinate with the British military to do so. He concurred with the RC that an increase in IPS outside the main gate would simply frighten local employees even more, because IPS have become associated in the minds of most Iraqis with murder campaigns.

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¶13. (C) Comment: MG Latif was careful and diplomatic in his descriptions of the governor, the CoP, and other political figures, and it was clear that he valued the ability to maintain dialogue and professional relations with all the players on the field. He was dismissive of the BPC's approach of boycotting and voting out people they did not agree with, and he believed that the provincial elections would result in many of the current political players in Basrah losing their seats. He also clearly does not believe that only 30 days of emergency security measures will result in a complete cure to the security situation in Basrah. However, he was obviously determined to carry out his role in keeping Basrah from falling into the hands of separatists that wish to monopolize the province's resources by forcing a national division. End Comment.

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